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SOVIET ATTITUDE TOWARD THE INDOCHINA WAR
AND ASIAN "LIBERATION MOVEMENT"

Recent Soviet conciliatory moves and the shift in the Communist position on Korea have not been followed by any changes in Communist strategy and tactics in Southeast Asia. The Soviet leaders apparently continue to believe that the encouragement and support of the "national liberation movement" is compatible with the current Communist "peace offensive."

The aim of this "peace offensive" is to create the impression of Kremlin interest in a relaxation of international tensions which is being thwarted only by American intransigence. To avoid responsibility for a continuation of this "just" war, the Soviet leaders portray the conflict in Indochina as a nationalist struggle against Western colonialism. This treatment is also designed to avoid raising doubts abroad concerning the "sincerity" of Soviet claims of readiness to resolve international disputes by a "businesslike discussion of problems."

The basic objective of Soviet propaganda in South and Southeast Asia is to capture permanently the intellectual and moral allegiance of the Asian peoples. The USSR is portrayed as the champion of legitimate Asian nationalist aspiration. The United States and the European "colonial" powers are charged with attempting to thwart these aspirations by intervening with military power against the "liberation movements." These movements will continue to be the main instrument of Soviet policy which is directed toward exploiting Asian nationalist, neutralist and anti-Western sentiment in an attempt to prevent the growth of Western power and influence throughout this area.

The advent of the new regime in Moscow has brought no apparent changes in the Kremlin's attitude toward colonial "liberation". Recent comment parallels Stalin's pledge during the October Party Congress of Soviet support of the "peoples in their struggle for liberation." On this same occasion, Malenkov hailed "the mighty upsurge of the struggle for national liberation in colonial and dependent countries" and pointed to the growing acuteness of the "crisis of the colonial system of imperialism."

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This same approach was reflected in Pravda's rejection of President Eisenhower's appeal for an end to the "direct and indirect attacks upon the security of Indochina and Malaya" on the ground that the Soviet Union cannot be expected to "retard the liberation movement of the colonial and semi-colonial people." The editorial further charged that the US is committing a fundamental error in insisting that the national liberation movement is the result of "inspiration" on the part of "individual ill-intentioned persons" rather than an expression of wholly legitimate nationalist aspirations. Pravda's charge that the US is attempting to "turn steadily developing events backwards" was also calculated to have a strong appeal among Asian peoples, as well as for some of America's allies who have been critical of past US actions in Asia.

During the last six months, and particularly since the beginning of this year, there has been a noticeable increase of attention in both Soviet and Chinese Communist propaganda to the situation in Indochina. Neither Soviet nor Chinese Communist propaganda had previously reflected the Viet Minh propaganda attention to Cambodia and Laos which had gradually increased after a Viet Minh resolution in July 1952 called for "the granting of more effective aid" to the Cambodian and Laotian resistance movements.

Moscow's comments on the recent events in Laos emphasize three main points: (1) the long-term nature of the Laotian people's resistance struggle; (2) the indigenous character and the legality of the "Resistance Government of Pathet Lao" (Free Laos); and (3) the military effectiveness of the Laotian "People's Liberation Army." The interdependence of the anti-French struggle in all three states of Indochina is also stressed with references to the "United National Front of Vietnam--Pathet Lao--Cambodia."

The absence in Soviet and Chinese Communist propaganda of explicit references to the Viet Minh offensive against Laos suggests that the Communist powers are anxious to forestall any increased Western or United Nations intervention. The attempt to picture the Laotian situation as a locally-engendered movement, without Communist aims or ties, is in line with efforts to keep the issue of the liberation movement, particularly the Indochina conflict, separate and distinct from any settlement of the Korean war.

Another effort to dissociate the USSR from the Laos invasion is evident in the prompt and widely broadcast TASS denial on 9 May of the allegation of the Chinese Ambassador to

the US that an agreement for joint Moscow-Peiping support of the Viet Minh had been signed last November between Communist China, the USSR, and the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam." A parallel denial was issued on the same date by Peiping.

It is impossible to determine whether Peiping or Moscow has ultimate guidance of Viet Minh policies. Several hundred Chinese Communist advisors and technicians assist the Viet Minh. The Chinese Communists are providing the Viet Minh with military supplies at an estimated average level of 400 - 500 tons per month, and limited numbers of Viet Minh troops are being sent to Communist China for training. There is some evidence that Viet Minh policy statements during the past year have been "cleared," if not written, in Peiping.

It is known that the Viet Minh have been receiving small amounts of Soviet aid, including munitions and trucks, for more than a year and a half. Reports of the presence of Soviet advisors with the Viet Minh have not been confirmed. The USSR and Communist China have recognized the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam", and the latter has sent ambassadors to both Peiping and Moscow. However, there are no indications that the USSR or Communist China intends to establish diplomatic missions in Viet Minh territory.

Neither Moscow nor Peiping has attempted to rationalize the Viet Minh withdrawal from Laos. Comment is limited to reports of the general progress made by the "liberation army." A French official in Indochina has stated that the Viet Minh invasion was not part of any grand communist plan for Southeast Asia but was originally aimed at limited objectives in northeastern Laos. In exploiting the advantage offered by the immediate withdrawal of French forces from Sam Neua, the Viet Minh probably proceeded beyond their planned objectives.

However, the invasion has achieved some important limited objectives, such as the creation in one of the occupied cities of a free Laotian Government and the establishment of advanced posts and underground networks for staging future operations.

Southern Laos and Cambodia are the probable objectives of future campaigns. The American Charge in Vientiane has recently warned that a renewal of a major Viet Minh drive against Laos in the fall appears to be "almost certain."

There appears to be no immediate prospect of a settlement of the war in Indochina. Any expression by Ho Chi Minh of willingness to negotiate would probably be no more than a de-

vice by which to forestall UN intervention. Moreover, the Soviet leaders may believe that their objectives in Europe are served by a continuation of Viet Minh military resistance. The heavy drain imposed on French manpower and resources by the Indochina war substantially reduces French military power in Europe and adds to French reluctance to permit German re-armament and European integration.

Beyond these considerations, the USSR is not likely to abandon its policy regarding the "liberation movements" which has already gained great prestige for the USSR throughout Asia and which the Soviet leaders may believe will gain even more in future discussions of Asian questions in the political conference which is to follow a Korean armistice and in United Nations debates on "colonial" issues. Finally Moscow will probably continue its indirect support and public encouragement of the "liberation movement" in order to expand, gradually and when opportunities develop, Communist influence in those areas where the Western position is insecure.